

Smart Growth Newsline

The Latest in Planning and Development from Massachusetts
and Around the Nation

Office for Commonwealth Development

Smart growth towns to get school aid



Agassiz Elementary School
Cambridge, Massachusetts

The day before Thanksgiving, Governor Mitt Romney signed the bill to reimburse communities for the increased education costs incurred when families move into new moderately-priced housing built in designated smart growth districts.

Under an existing program, Chapter 40R, cities and towns that change their zoning to allow more housing and mixed-use development in town centers, downtowns, near transit stations and on industrial land receive cash pay-

ments. But some municipalities have been worried about increased school costs associated with new families moving in; the new law, known as Chapter 40S, ensures that school aid rises with enrollment associated with housing production in smart growth districts.

“We need to build more housing to keep our state economically competitive. This bill acknowledges community costs that may be associated with increased housing production,” Romney said.

Douglas I. Foy, Secretary of the Office for Commonwealth Development, said the signing of the legislation means that growth can now provide positive benefits for communities – a sense of place, expanded housing choices, less congestion, more open space, funding to cover basic services and now even more funding to cover school costs.

Foy said communities that take advantage of the incentives will create “the kinds of vibrant and successful downtown Massachusetts has known and loved since its founding.”

Geoffrey C. Beckwith, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Municipal Association, said that communities “want to grow their housing stock while ensuring that they will be able to deliver a full range of basic services to their new residents, including quality schooling,” and that “Chapter 40S addresses this key concern.”

“Massachusetts has continued to lose population over the past decade, in part due to skyrocketing housing prices,” said Senator Harriette L. Chandler. “Smart growth districts will provide much needed housing in a way that minimizes impacts on local communities. This new bill improves upon the smart growth law and will help ensure that future generations will be able to afford to stay right here.” Lieutenant Governor Kerry Healey applauded the signing and pledged to “continue to work with municipalities to provide incentives that encourage growth and development.” (November 23, 2005)

Lower prices seen in smaller lots

Housing prices in Eastern Massachusetts could be decreased by as much as \$100,000 and land consumption could be cut in half if communities in the Route 128-Interstate 495 corridor moved away from the current practice of building homes on lots that are on average as big as a football field, according to a new study released Nov. 7.

Homes on the average 1.08 acre lot – in contrast to the national average of one-quarter of an acre – would fall in price from \$400,000 to \$293,000, while cutting vacant land consumption and doubling the number of homes built, according to the study, done by Edward Moscovitch, president of Cape Ann Eco-

nomics.

The report, “Open Space, Housing Construction and Home Prices – What’s the Payoff from Smart Growth,” was commissioned by the Massachusetts Housing Partnership. It is available through the organization’s website at www.mhp.net.

“A lot of what’s driving this is the fear by communities that increased growth will bring in children and drive up school costs,” Moscovitch said of large-lot zoning practices. “We’re chewing up our landscape in a futile effort to make sure development occurs someplace else.”

Clark Ziegler, executive director of the Massachusetts Housing Partnership, said “we’re using far too much land. We

can’t simply build our way out of the housing crisis. We have to change the rules to allow for development on smaller lots.”

Massachusetts cities and towns have incentives to change their zoning to allow mixed-use and more compact residential development under Chapter 40R. The Moscovitch study is one of the first quantified reports to show a clear benefit from the establishment of “smart growth” districts: more affordable housing, combined with more open space preserved. (November 21, 2005)

Compact growth saves money: study

Massachusetts residents will pay \$202.7 billion or \$26,294 per person to live in sprawling communities through 2025, according to new research, but would save \$20.8 billion or \$2,698 per person if just one-quarter of future development is more compact. Nationwide, Americans are paying \$84 million a day -- \$31 billion annually -- to live in sprawling communities, according to researchers at Rutgers University and the Brookings Institute.

The 10-year economic analysis, which projects costs to 2025, says the big money pit is infrastructure costs – extending roads and water and sewer lines to far-flung subdivisions

and commercial strips. Basic services such as schools, police and fire are strained by the increased coverage areas, leading to higher taxes.

"It seems so much simpler to buy farmland at the edge and build a familiar housing subdivision, but in the long run, this is a more costly strategy," said Dr. Robert Burchell, co-director of the Center for Urban Policy Research at Rutgers University, who did the research along with Anthony Downs, senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, Barbara McCann, transportation and land use policy writer, and Sahan Mukherji, research associate at the Center for Urban Policy Research.

Sprawl is expensive for families who must maintain at least two cars to get around, and it's expensive for local governments. Taking into account all revenues and costs, sprawl will create a fiscal deficit for local governments, the researchers say.

Over the next thirty years, the

United States is expected to become home to 90 million more people. Accommodating this population in sprawling development will cost \$6.4 trillion from 2000 to 2025. If only one-quarter of future development was compact, the savings over 25 years would include:

- \$2.6 billion from 4.6 million fewer water and sewer hookups
- \$110 billion from 188,000 fewer lane miles of new roads
- \$420 billion from decreased development costs as average home costs drop
- \$24 million a day in car-related costs from driving 56 million fewer miles

The research, which details the costs of sprawl for 20 top metropolitan areas and adjacent rural counties, predated recent increases in fuel costs. The work is contained in "Sprawl Costs: Economic Impacts of Unchecked Development," published by Island Press. <http://www.sprawlcosts.org/> (November 14, 2005)

EPA awards cite smart growth efforts

Smart growth is happening from Connecticut to California, judging by the Environmental Protection Agency's 2005 National Awards for Smart Growth Achievement. The citations include:

- The Denver Urban Renewal Authority, for the redevelopment of an abandoned amusement park into Highland's Garden Village, a compact, mixed-use community that includes single-family and town homes and affordable senior and family apartments, with shared playgrounds and parks and native plants to reduce wa-

tering needs, on a 27-acre site.

- Lakewood, Colo. and the Lakewood Reinvestment Authority for the redevelopment of a declining shopping mall into a walkable downtown called Belmar. The site now features stores, homes, parks and work places on a grid of small blocks, with narrow streets and generous sidewalks, and condominium apartments and town homes, plus parks, squares and plazas.

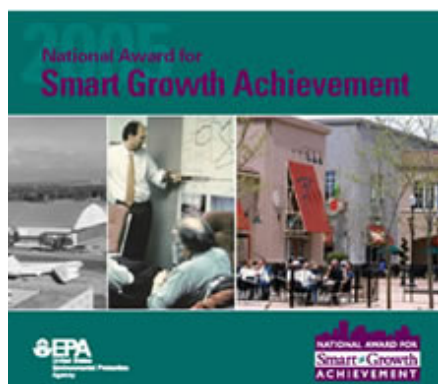
- The Pasadena, Calif. Planning and Development Department, for its Central District Specific Plan and design guidelines, which encourage historically sensitive, mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly development in an area featuring four light rail stations.

- The town of Redding, Conn., for the cleanup and redevelopment of the abandoned Gilbert & Bennett Wire Mill into a mixed-use, transit-oriented neighborhood. Original buildings will be rehabilitated, while those covering the mill stream will be removed. A performing arts center, health facility and shops and restaurants will draw people back to the old commercial center.

- Orlando, Fla., for the redevelopment of the former Orlando Naval Training Center into a new neighborhood of 4,100 homes and 450 acres of lakes and parks. A new grid of streets, sidewalks and paths reconnects parts of Orlando formerly separated by the base security fence. Demolition waste was recycled; 200,000 tons of crushed concrete were used in an underground storm water management system, allowing the city to replace a massive storm water retention pond with 16 acres of parkland.

The National Award for Smart Growth Achievement, now in its fourth year and drawing 63 applications from 26 states and the District of Columbia, is under the EPA's smart growth program in the Office of Policy, Economics and Innovation.

For more: <http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/awards.htm> (November 15, 2005)



Denver Emerging as TOD Mecca

As Massachusetts continues a major campaign to bring about more transit-oriented development, the Denver area, home to 2.6 million people and growing, has emerged as a leading Western model for the trend.

Last November, voters in metro Denver passed a sales tax increase to fund a \$4.7 billion program called FasTracks. In the next year, the fledgling light rail system will expand by 35 miles. During the next decade, the \$4.7 billion program will yield another 119 new miles of new electric light rail, diesel-fueled commuter rail, and bus rapid transit.

The new transportation network is transforming the development landscape in the Denver area. Far-flung single-family subdivisions and commercial zones based on the separated-use model are being eclipsed by plans for mixed-use redevelopment of abandoned factory sites, vacant infill parcels and reinvented centers and villages in Denver's older suburbs.

"There are no other regions of the country taking on anything like this," Shelley Poticha, director of the Oakland, Calif., Center for Transit-Oriented Development, told the High Country News.

Developers, planners and politicians, particularly Denver's mayor, John Hickenlooper, have turned away from low-density development that requires the costly extension of infrastructure. Instead, the region is turning to what already exists, for some creative re-use. Walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods are

rising at the closed Stapleton Airport, in aging warehouse districts and on outdated 1960s-era shopping malls, such as Villa Italia and Cinderella City.

Since 1980, metro Denver has gained 1 million residents, bringing the total population to 2.6 million. Demographers predict the figure will rise to 3.9 million by 2030. To accommodate the growth, regional leaders are going back to the future, and tying land use to the rails.

As the High Country News explains, Denver once had an array of streetcars. Begun in 1872, drawn first by horses, the streetcars were soon electrified and extended into the countryside, creating the "streetcar suburbs" that are today Denver's oldest and densest neighborhoods. Similar "interurban" lines radiated to nearby farming towns, and to Boulder, 25 miles away. Even small farming towns, like Fort Collins, Colo., had trolleys and streetcars soon after the 20th century dawned. A century later, as traffic overwhelmed metro highways, Denver first pushed for a 5.3 mile light rail line in 1994, and then an 8.7 mile extension from downtown to the southwest suburbs in 2000. Work is underway on another 19-mile extension paralleling the clogged Interstate 25, and now the big FasTracks extension is also going forward.

The new rail lines will have 57 new stations, 50 of them with potential for the kind of business and residential mix that Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper envisions as the new standard for development in the area: villages with six- to 10-story buildings clustered within walking distance of the station.

"The idea is that when you fly over Denver 20 or 30 years from now, hopefully you will be able to see these dots of urban villages, and make out the skeleton of our transit system," he said in the High Country Times article.

The full article is available at <http://www.headwatersnews.org/hcn.denverrail111605.html>.

Other recent articles on transit-oriented development include a survey of current and planned projects by Retail Traffic magazine, http://retailtrafficmag.com/mag/retail_next_stop_suburbia/; another by Commercial Investment Real Estate magazine, http://www.ciremagazine.com/article.php?article_id=870; and commentary by Michigan Land Use Institute executive director Keith Schneider at <http://www.mlui.org/print.asp?fileid=16880>.



(Photo courtesy of Urban Advantage, Dover, Kohl and Partners.)

SMART GROWTH EVENTS FOR JANUARY 2006

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13 MMA Annual Meeting and Trade Show www.mmm.org	14 MMA Annual Meeting and Trade Show www.mmm.org
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26 5th Annual New Partners for Smart Growth Conference www.outreach.psu.edu/	27 5th Annual New Partners for Smart Growth Conference www.outreach.psu.edu/	28 5th Annual New Partners for Smart Growth Conference www.outreach.psu.edu/
29	30					

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For more information on the Smart Growth Hotline, a publication of Office for Commonwealth Development, please contact Anthony Flint, Director of Smart Growth Education at (617) 573-1395 or ocd@massmail.state.ma.us

The mission of the Massachusetts Office for Commonwealth Development (OCD) is to care for the built and natural environment by promoting sustainable development through the integration of energy, environmental, housing, and transportation agencies' policies, programs and regulations. OCD will encourage the coordination and cooperation of all agencies, invest public funds wisely in smart growth and equitable development, give priority to investments that will deliver living wage jobs, transit access, housing, open space, and community-serving enterprises, and be guided by a set of sustainable development principles.